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A VISIT TO MADRAS;

BEING

A SKETCH

OF THE

LOCAL AND CHARACTERISTIC PECULIARITIES

OF

That Presidency,

IN THE YEAR 1811.

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A VISIT TO MADRAS,

&c. &c.

LETTER I.

TO ROBERT CALDERWOOD, ESQ.

Madras. — Catamaran. — Natives. — Dubashes. — Griffins.— Surf.—Massoolah Boat.—The Beach.—Situation of the Settlement.—Black Town.—Garden-Houses.—Fort.—Shopping.—Dinner.—Hookah.

MY DEAR SIR, *Madras, May* 17*th.*

SCARCELY had we anchored at this place, after a pleasant passage from Mauritius, ere the general attention was directed to three men, half erect in the water, making toward the ship, without any perceptible means of sustaining themselves. A short time explained the wonder; they were seated on one of those far-famed machines (imitations of which were used against the Boulogne flotilla in 1801) called catamarans. This consists simply of three logs of wood, each six or eight inches in diameter, and about six feet long, bound together by ropes, one end being rounded off, for the convenience of making swifter progress through the water. The surface is flat, and being level with the sea, is, of course, continually washed by it. One or more men, according to circumstances, squatted on their knees, work it with paddles, alternately, on either side, for hours together, in a position so singularly uneasy to my eyes, that my joints almost ache at the recollection. On this slippery fabric, however, will they venture off several miles to sea, with letters or messages to shipping, when boats dare not, or will not, make the attempt. The men are, of course, excellent swimmers; and being continually washed off when the sea is in the least degree rough, as quickly regain their seat and their paddle (the only furniture of the raft) remaining thus for nearly the whole day immersed in water. In diving, they are equally expert, so that articles lost from the Massoolah boats are generally soon recovered, by their exertions.

The trusty Mercury of the float, who had no other covering than a rag round his middle and another twisted round his head, in the form of a turban, after a variety of *salams*, or salutations of the head nearly down to the deck, drew from the folds of his head-dress, a dispatch, announcing the death of Admiral Drury, and the sailing of the expedition against Java, under Sir Samuel Auchmuty and Commodore Broughton; Lord Minto, it appears, likewise accompanied it. A violent hurricane or typhon came on two days afterwards, far exceeding in violence any that has occurred here since 1782, when the fleet of Sir Edward Hughes was nearly destroyed. Great fears, therefore, are entertained for the safety of the armament.

Before the storm came on in the evening, nearly a hundred sail of vessels, principally coasters, lay at anchor in the roads; in the morning, the greater part of these, including his Majesty's ships Dover and Chichester, were strewed in fragments on the beach. The horrors of the night are said to have been indescribable. Many of the native vessels, at all times ill-calculated to encounter tempests, foundered at their anchors; others snapped their cables and became engulphed in the surf; while the cries of the sufferers, now and then heard in the darkness, amid the howling of winds and waves, produced the most poignant distress, with scarcely the possibility of rendering them the least assistance. On shore, large trees were torn up by the roots, doors and window-shutters dashed with violence from their hinges, palings, sentry-boxes, every thing in short capable of being seized by the wind, overturned and carried away. The whole appearance of the roads offering a wide and wild expanse of sea, well accords with the rudeness of the surf, scarcely relieved by the view of the fort, the snowy whiteness of the buildings, an extensive town, and a serene blue sky. To a nautical eye there is no shelter; every breeze and flitting cloud is dreaded, by the seaman, as a disguised enemy.

Having remained on-board during the night, I was roused sometime about the hour of six, next morning, by a loud clattering of voices in the gun-room, in an unknown language. One of the officers, it appeared, was amusing himself with a group of natives, who had ventured off thus early, on various errands; as merchants, dubashes, servants, mechanics, and beggars; some knew not what they wanted, and others, by their own account, had merely come to enquire after "the health of master," their common term for Europeans. The group would have amused you. The figure generally did not exceed the middle size, slim in its form, enveloped in a long white dress and turban, the features mild and handsome, though grounded on a black face, the ears ornamented with rings, and the whole appearance feminine.

One of the party seeing me peep from my cabin, obsequiously approached, and, placing both hands on his forehead, bowed nearly to the deck, exclaiming, " Salam, Master," the usual salutation of a Hindoo. I was not yet dressed; but my new acquaintance seemed so attentive, so desirous to please, and withal the custom of the country has so entitled the whole fraternity to several liberties, that I could not find in my heart to make him retire. A volley of inquiries after my health and night's rest nearly overwhelmed me; these were followed by a request to become my dubash, accompanied by positive assurances of his being *a very, very honest man.* The smile excited by this declaration served to encourage the solicitations of another candidate for my favours, who made a similar request, prefaced by the same round of affectionate queries. The first, however, alarmed at the idea of losing me, immediately seized his rival by the shoulders—" No, no, master"—said he—" no character —no honest man;"—He was abused, and as quickly grappled by the throat, in return. I expected a deluge of blows to follow; but, after violent mutual abuse, added to the clinching of fists, and the utmost fury of gesture, the storm ceased, their hands dropped from each other, and in five minutes more, to my great surprise, they were again fast friends.

Anxious to see as much as possible of the manners, tricks, and occupations of this motley assemblage, we admitted all classes. One countenance at length pleased me.—" Well, boy,"—for, be it remembered, every native, however old, is usually called boy,—" can you recommend me a good dubash?" —" Yes, yes, master — me very good dubash — me very honest man, sir;—have plenty of character, master,"—and he eagerly produced at least a quire of certificates from former employers, many couched in a ludicrous or satirical strain.— " Plenty officer know me, sir,—buy every ting dat master want very cheap—muslin—nankeen—silk—palampou—fan—shirt." —" Hold, hold, my friend—I am not a merchant,—besides I have very little money."

The fellow grinned incredulity to my plea of poverty more powerfully than he could express it by language.—" Ah, master from England alway rich—have plenty of money for poor man." —Englishmen and riches, I find, are universally coupled.—It was impossible to resist so flattering an assurance; and, therefore, after a little more conversation, I engaged this very honest man, as he called himself, in my service.

A dubash, you must be informed, is a customary appendage to all temporary sojourners in India. To a naval officer, who often arrives with the comfortable assurance of not having a single acquaintance to whom he can apply for the trifling infor-

mation and news of the place, he is a kind of necessary evil; in fact, a species of valet-de-place. The dubash knows where the principal people reside; he communicates the news of the town; forms an humble guide to all places of business or amusement; keeps in constant attendance; runs about in the sun; and will either conclude bargains as a broker, or introduce the native merchant in person. In either case, imposition must be expected; but, perhaps, trusting to the dubash is of the two the wiser plan; he does not always bargain for a salary, but trusts to the generosity of his employer—to his wits—and to a certain per centage on articles purchased at the native shops, paid by the venders, and called custom; he is peculiarly tender on the point of honesty, and insists upon it strenuously—a pretty sure proof of having very little. This class usually assail strangers. On a higher scale, they become more respectable, possessing wealth, often embarking in extensive mercantile transactions, and lending large sums of money to Europeans upon their ventures, particularly the officers of Indiamen. To these men also, some of the Company's civil servants often become indebted in large sums.

My new acquaintance, who seemed eager to anticipate my wishes, was a true Asiatic—supple, mild, insinuating, submissive, unremittingly attentive even to my looks;—where people thus voluntarily become slaves, how difficult it is not to play the tyrant! A handsome palanquin, he said, awaited my pleasure on-shore, along with a trusty servant, who, like himself, never cheated *griffin* gentleman. This term may likewise require explanation. A stranger is facetiously denominated a *griffin*, when, being unacquainted with the more knavish tricks of the people around him, he becomes the dupe of innumerable impositions, a kind of fair game, in fact, to leeches of all classes, who seem to think themselves entitled to fleece him in every practicable mode. The period of griffinage is said to exist for a year; about which time the adventurer, if he be sharp, may become capable of combating with the host of conspirators against his property. Passengers newly imported from Europe; ships-of-war arrived on the station; travellers, merchants, sailors, soldiers, all pay this tax for their knowledge of the country; and, on the arrival of every fresh cargo of dupes, you might suppose, by the expression of the sable faces on Madras beach, they were on the point of enjoying a gala-day.

To cross the surf is at all times an unpleasant undertaking, and sometimes even dangerous; but as the wonders of the new scene could not be otherwise enjoyed, we took advantage of a *Massoolah* boat that came off to the ship. This is the far-famed conveyance of which probably you have heard; the

bottom is flat; the sides, bow, and stern raised, to keep off the spray, which is much assisted by the boat swimming high out of the water, in consequence of being formed of very light wood, sewed together by means of the fibrous coat of the cocoa-nut, not a nail being used in her construction; sometimes, notwithstanding every care, they are upset by the furious surge; catamarans attend them in bad weather to assist, in case of accident, and a particular flag announces when it is dangerous.

Having gained the outer line, or bar, of the surf, for it commonly breaks in three distinct ridges, each nearer than the other to the shore, the rowers simultaneously paused; their hitherto cheerful song likewise ceased; but, when the surf once broke, and an opportunity offered for pulling in with greater safety, they exerted all their strength, bursting at the same moment into loud and hurried exclamations, which, combined with a peculiar expression of countenance, presented a very vivid and natural picture of alarm. At every break, this was repeated; the force of the surge was indescribable, whirling the boat most furiously forward on its white and shattered summit, we scarcely knew whither, while by the shocks, she trembled as if threatening to fall into a thousand pieces.

I question, however, whether the importunity of the group that awaited our landing, was not more annoying than the surf. It was now a living surf—a mass of people, not of waters, that crowded around and threatened to overwhelm us.—" Master, me good dubash."—" Have one good boy?"—" Me very honest man."—" Do every ting for master."—" Buy very cheap, sir."—" Fine palanquin—plenty of bearer for master."—" Have Cooley boy, sir?—take trunk, parcel, any ting,"—and a hundred similar exclamations issued from as many voices. The luggage was instantly seized by contending coolies (porters); I had no small difficulty in extricating my person from the same fate; and was almost ill-natured enough to envy our companion, B——, the possession of a horse-whip, which he exercised, with vast advantage to himself. In the confusion created by this rabble, indeed, it is not uncommon for the coolies, except well-watched, to trot off with their burdens to the *thieving bazaar* and disposing of it for their own benefit; but being aware of the trick, no Duenna of old ever more narrowly watched a young and blooming beauty than we did these nimble-fingered porters.

Palanquins, already arranged on the beach for our party, proved a most welcome retreat from the sun, and of course underwent a minute scrutiny. They are in fact coach-bodies in miniature, allowing the passenger to extend himself at length, or to sit upright, supported by cushions, his heels being in the

same line with his body; the construction is light; a single pole, therefore, at either end supports it, each resting on the bare shoulders of two men, who trot about the town, at the rate of five miles an hour. The regular number of bearers for hire is commonly six, or eight, who occasionally relieve each other; —in a family not so many;—on a journey, two or three more perhaps may be added; and Europeans travel, in this manner, several hundred miles, the men living on little else than curried rice and fowl.

Amused with the novelty of this conveyance, it seemed but a few minutes' brisk trot ere we reached a tolerable inn, on the verge of Black Town, and bordering the esplanade. Within the fort there was a better, but the situation appeared confined. Our choice, on the contrary, was open and airy, having a good view of the fort and its numerous houses; and, besides other recommendations, receiving the full benefit of the sea-breeze, not a small one, believe me, in this region of sun and sand. In this neighbourhood, also, were the shops, both European and native, where the usual nick-nacks and finery sought after by strangers are sold. My purchases of course will be trifling; but were I to return from the very birth-place of crapes, silks, and muslins, quite empty-handed, how would it be possible to look my female acquaintance in the face?

A new-comer, on casting his eyes around, after securing a footing on-shore, feels convinced he has entered a new world. The surf, the Massoolah boat, the dresses, features, and obsequious importunity of the people, the handsome style of the houses, white as snow, and set-off with colonades and porticoes; the mount road, garden-houses, elegant equipages, palanquins, all strike him as objects he has never before seen combined. Added to these, the intermixture of whites with all the nations of the East,—the extent of the town—its importance as the second Presidency of our Eastern Empire—its wealth as a commercial depôt, though destitute of a port—press forcibly on his imagination.

A worse situation for a great capital could scarcely have been chosen, being placed in a large, arid plain, the vegetation scanty, and the soil, except in the gardens of the white inhabitants, producing little for general use. The action of the sun upon the sand renders the heat often excessive; it is likewise exposed to burning winds, loaded with a suffocating fiery dust, that occasions much distress, keeping the thermometer for days together at 100°. In such a situation, would you conceive that love gave origin to this place?—Yet such is the case. Sir William Langhorne, about the time of the restoration, or, as some assert, during the civil war, fixed upon the site, not for its con-

venience, but from being contiguous to the object of his amorous vows:—"What mighty measures spring from little things!"—A famous demi-rep of antiquity had influence enough to destroy a town; but our modern enchantress more patriotically raised one—and the deed may be permitted to cover a multitude of sins;—may the votaries of Venus never leave behind them a worse memento!—It was once (1746) taken by La Bourdonnais and ransomed; Lally afterwards made an attempt upon it, and failed; and, in 1782, it trembled before the arms of Hyder Ally. Madras and Pondicherry, the chief settlements of England and France, on the coast of Coromandel, were long the Rome and Carthage of India. Orme has well detailed their struggles; ever striving for the mastery, ever at war, either by arms or intrigues, it became a happy circumstance for the harassed country, when, at length, one was finally subdued.

Black Town, so called from the prevailing colour of the population, contains little worthy of notice; it is defended from sudden inroads by a ditch and a few works now little attended to; the streets are small and irregular; the houses of the natives commonly mean, often displaying squalid poverty, though plastered with the white mortar called chunam. The richer class, however, sometimes affect elegance in their habitations and equipages, but though the majority of native merchants have the reputation of wealth, few comparatively seem fond of displaying it. Several Europeans, likewise, reside here or have their shops and counting-houses in the vicinity; but for a family-residence, it is quite unfashionable, these being all two or three miles distant, and called Garden Houses. The population is very large, some say 150,000, but this probably is exaggerated by a fourth; it consists of all the Eastern nations and religious sects, Mohamedans, Persees, Armenians, the followers of Confucius, Black, or (as they are termed) Portuguese Christians, besides whites from all the nations of Europe; and the usual disciples of Bhudha and Bramah. An obvious distinction among the latter strikes a stranger at first sight. Some have a perpendicular line of yellow pigment drawn on the forehead immediately over the nose, while others have it extended horizontally; the former designating the followers of *Vishnou*, the latter of *Shiva*, commonly called Malabars. From the forehead, the eye is directly attracted to the lips, on the lower of which, is often curiously projected, from the mouth, a red mass, or ball, resembling a diseased excrescence, but formed of the betel-leaf and areca-nut, mixed with a finer sort of chunam, which corrodes and blackens the teeth, (a beauty among

the Hindoo fashionables) renders the gums livid, and imparts a deep-red colour to the saliva, so that the mouth seems as if gorged with blood.

A few Portuguese and Armenian churches, besides mosques and pagodas, are scattered through Black Town. The range of buildings on the beach near the landing-place, consisting of private offices and the naval arsenal, at a distance looks grand; but, on a nearer view, seems unfinished. House-rent is so universally dear, that a respectable mansion for a family costs between five or six hundred pounds per annum. The general style of living is likewise expensive; yet, paradoxical as it may appear, all the necessaries, and many of the luxuries, of life are moderate in price; but the autocrats of fashion having established here, as in other places, a certain system of their own, it is expected to be followed by the minor satellites of the sphere, if they calculate on being countenanced. But the appropriate mansions of familiar intercourse are the garden-houses, so called from being situated more in the country amid trees, flowers, gardens, and all the other attendants on rural life. Here luxury seems to have retreated from cities, to seek more exquisite joys in retirement; here, likewise, the beauty and fashion of the place meet to run the round of pleasure. The houses are generally detached; they are also at some distance both from the fort and from Black Town; the principal people inhabit them; and the merchant, fatigued with the labours of the day in the country-house, retires hither at four or five o'clock, to rest for the evening, in the bosom of his family. They are in fact to Madras, what some of the better suburbs are to London,—with this difference, that in the latter, are seen plain unassuming men—in the former, more consequential characters, who, with many fine qualities, are accused of a degree of pride not altogether becoming the mercantile character.

Here, likewise, are said to have originated some of those dark schemes and unjust projects, supposed to characterize that terrible monster—an oriental politician. I know not whether it arises from reading or prejudice, but I am often tempted to look upon the whites, with an eye of suspicion. I can fancy murder, and rapine, and violence in many a face, that turns out to belong to very worthy men; and, notwithstanding tales of plunder and extortion, I hear of many fortunes made in a very lawful and honourable way. Many well-meaning persons in England, I know will scarcely believe this; for the prosecution of some celebrated personages and the vividness of Burke's imagination, brilliant, in the extreme, in all its varied and masterly colourings, have involuntarily associated, in many minds, injustice and robbery with the name of India. It has, indeed,

been the scene of many of our merits and faults; courage and policy, intrigue, and perhaps perfidy, all the good and most of the bad qualities of our nature, have been exerted here, in a degree not excelled even in Europe.

Fort St. George is the second work in India, being inferior only to Fort William, and was planned by Robins, the actual writer of Anson's voyage, as well as of an Essay on Mathematics, and likewise of a Treatise on Gunnery; he died here in 1751, chief-engineer to the Company. On one side, it skirts the sea; on the other, an esplanade of some extent adjoins the glacis; the construction is irregular though good, but some parts seem falling to decay, for Hyder Ally is no longer thundering at the gates.

Within this structure, the intermixture of civil and military life appears remarkable. It is in fact a small though well-filled town, containing several good houses, the extensive stores of the Company, the merchant's counting-houses and other offices, intermingled with guns, bastions, and barracks. Here you may contrast, at every step, the man of war with the man of traffic, the muster-roll with the ledger, the bayonet with the pen, the sentry-box with the desk and counter. The precaution of keeping within the walls was at first adopted from the facility with which immense armies of cavalry formerly overran the plains, destroying or carrying off every species of property as well as the inhabitants, and retreating, before it was known where the blow was struck.

The private houses are lofty, the apartments generally spacious; and, as coolness is the principal object of attainment in the class of comforts, few are decorated with those endless masses of rich furniture, which distinguish houses in the mother-country. An open space in the centre of the fort contains a fine statue of the late Marquis Cornwallis, executed, if my memory be correct, by Bacon; the Company certainly owed him this tribute of respect. From the works may be had a good view of the sea; in the evening, the walk is refreshing; but walking, among the fair sex at least, is not in fashion, for a lady would almost as soon think of going out naked, as without an equipage.

The inn in the fort, as already remarked, is superior to any in Black-town, and also, as I can vouch, much dearer. Two companions and myself sat down, for a few minutes, to a plain tiffin or lunch, and the charge was forty-five shillings, which probably might have cost as many pence in England; it fell to my lot to pay; I could not avoid asking the man whether he imagined I belonged to the Bengal staff, or had been robbing a rajah? Boniface smiled; but I suppose being *griffins*,

it is quite right we should pay for experience. There is, in general, a considerable garrison kept here, and altogether it is probably too strong for any attempts by the native powers, though it would suffer severely from bombardment; but whenever it comes to this, it will, I believe, be quite time to re-embark altogether for England.

Having previously arranged the customary preliminaries of a good dinner and the best wine, we had still abundance of time for other objects; and, therefore, trotted back from the fort to the native shops, each attended by his dubash, his servant, and four relief-bearers, forming among the whole of our party, no trifling cavalcade; for here a middling man has as many attendants as the prince of another country. The shops make little display, a few streets constituting the bazaar, and the dubash being the guide. It is his express occupation to argue and bluster incessantly, beating down the merchant from a pagoda (8*s*.) to a rupee, (2*s*. 6*d*.) and from a rupee to a fanam, (2½*d*.) with all the skill of an able engineer familiar with the best points of attack; in a small way, the bargain usually proceeds thus:

The vender being introduced, demands at least double or treble the sum he intends to take; this being resisted, the price is in a trifling degree lowered; the dubash now interferes, insisting on the exorbitancy of the charge, when high words, in an unknown language, and violent gestures ensue, till at length the broker, pouncing upon the goods like a tiger on his prey, seizes them by main force,—the merchant stoutly resists,—it seems a fair trial of strength between them; but by degrees they slip into the hands of the former, who, fixing his own price, leaves the seller apparently disconsolate and dissatisfied. This farce is acted, with a perfect understanding among the parties; without it, a bargain would be nothing, and the price you may conclude is not the lowest, but after so many words and so much exertion have been used in your service, how ungrateful would it be not to sanction the bargain? Sometimes, indeed, my dubash wrangled lustily for a fanam, when I thought he was surrendering a rupee too easily; more than once I almost fancied him, by his heat and violence, in earnest, but interference spoiled the market; for so essential is this riot to business, that it can scarcely be avoided by complying with the first demand, however exorbitant.

The termination of the shopping excursion brought us to dinner. In tropical climates, early meals are certainly conducive to health; but in India, this repast is reckoned early, if brought to table before seven or eight o'clock. *Tiffin* is only its advanced-guard, to take the fiery edge off the enemy,

hunger, and appears about one o'clock. It is no other than the English lunch, but so improved in splendour and variety, that it is difficult to recognize our old acquaintance. Several of the older (and wiser) residents judiciously make their dinner at this hour, and sit down to table, in the evening, more as a matter of ceremony than to partake freely of its dainties: in merely male parties, where there are no engagements on hand, the hookah and conversation succeed till the period of retiring to rest.

High living, indeed, is by no means so general as it was some years ago; for it has been discovered that late and hearty meals contribute too bountifully to the physicians. This is universally admitted; yet, as a pretty good sample of the usual power of human reason opposed to human habits and passions, some, while they acknowledge the truth of the new theory, religiously persist in the old practice, and eat and drink as if they were, in the words of Scripture, to die to-morrow. Their temerity, however, is often punished by an attack of that arch-enemy "the Liver." The doleful complaints produced by this dread word, which, I ought to inform you, implies a diseased state of the organ, seriously alarm a new comer; they meet him in all companies, and in conversation serve for politics, and fashions, and the weather. But, by degrees, the tones become familiar, the reports appear exaggerated, and the young and giddy European meeting perhaps with a few companions upon whom climate has had no effect, forgets, in their conviviality, his predetermined schemes of abstinence.

In fact, it is useless to preach on this tender theme to a true John Bull; Englishmen are proverbially fond of good living; take away their powers of stomach, and they sink to the level of common every-day mortals. The native pride, the spirit, the independence of the animal, quits him along with his appetite; and, therefore, as I would not injure him, no, not for the world, let him enjoy himself, even at the risk of the "Liver:" I would not write another line against a well-furnished table, for the fortune of a nabob!

And to convince you of it, we have been all this time at dinner, indulging in all the good things to be found in the town, notwithstanding our lessons on moderation—so much for philosophy! Fancy our party seated round the table, with the independence of Britons, after a bountiful repast; the countenance shortened into the most expressive good-humour, drinking wine at the temperature of 45°, with the thermometer at 86°; squeamishly particular lest a villainous musk-rat should have once in its life run over the cork, and rendered it unfit for the use of gentlemen; the very idea of which would almost make an

Anglo-Indian faint, though fanned by more than a dozen black attendants. An instrument named punkah, worked by simple machinery, is often used for this purpose; I need not add the philosophical application, that it promotes the cooling process of evaporation, and that the greater the volume of air, the more powerful is the effect. It is on the same principle, that the sea-breeze cools many places within the tropics, which would be otherwise scarcely habitable.

But the most favourite luxury is the hookah, a complicated instrument used for smoking; the vapour of the tobacco, or any other herb that may be preferred, being rendered mild, by passing to the mouth through water. A servant, named hookah-badar is kept expressly to attend it. And, oh, death to the passion of love! I am informed, that several ladies long resident, or born in the country, indulge in this recreation. Only fancy an interesting female face enveloped in fumes of smoke, issuing from her mouth, at the same time gracefully swinging a few fathoms of the elastic tube over her shoulder! Great as our partiality is for the sex, this spectacle, I am afraid, would be a complete extinguisher to the softer passion.

LETTER II.

Local Phraseology.—Esplanade.—Public Drive.—Mosquitoes.—Gunpowder.—Champoeing.—Conjurors.—Jugglers of another Description.—Thieving Bazaar.—Hindoo Thefts.—Ennui.—A Ball.—Hindoo Marriage.—Character.

Madras, May.

Should ever fortune, in a whimsical mood, whirl you toward this part of the world, let me, by all means, recommend you to make out a vocabulary by the way; without this, you will be almost as much at a loss, among your countrymen here, as if our mother-tongue was forgotten. What am I to understand, for instance, when a civil friend sends me a *chit*, to know whether I will go out in his *bandy*, and *tiff* in his *bungaloe;* afterwards view the *choultries* and *pagodas* in the neighbourhood; return to a *go-down*, or an *out-cry*; have a comfortable *hookah*, and drink *sanganee*, under the draught of the *punkah*, or in the *verandah* of his *garden-house?*—Will you not be tempted to think that the slang language has travelled hither from Seven-dials, yet this jargon continually assails the ear. Often do I raise my wondering eyes, and put my faculties on the stretch to conjecture the probable import of these

and a hundred other equally obscure phrases. Sometimes I have thoughts of hiring an interpreter; then, again, many words seem to defy all explanation; but now I have hit upon the expedient, (where I can take the liberty) of requesting those who address me, to speak in plain English, or, if this is not attended to, I take care to demand an explanation, word by word.

Allured by the serenity of the evening, we rambled over the esplanade, without any regard to the vulgarity of the thing. Not a white face but our own to be seen. The Mount-road (the grand avenue to Madras) is fine; it is lined by rows of large trees, and, in the cool of the day, is frequented by numerous equipages, adorned by many elegant women. This is, indeed, the fashionable drive of the place, where the gay children of pleasure meet to exchange the ceremony of nods, or to retail the chit-chat of the moment, previously to the hour of dinner.

But I must enter my protest against the ladies confining their amusement to a carriage-airing alone. Why give the legs a continual holiday, to the serious injury of the other members of the body? A single walk is worth a dozen such excursions; yet, from neglect of this healthful occupation, how many sad complaints do we hear brought against the barbarous climate for spoiling a pretty face, or changing a fine complexion. The fact is, they themselves, not the climate, are to blame, and I see no excuse for these fair offenders but fashion. When the sun declines, the temperature is not unpleasant without doors; and there are neither bolts nor bars, nor jealous men, to coop them up in a close-carriage or a suffocating apartment.

Government-house is a spacious though heavy pile of building. The banqueting-room is magnificent. Architects say it requires a new roof, and several other alterations, to render it tolerable to an eye of any taste. It was erected, after his own design, I believe, by the celebrated Lord Clive, one of the many great military geniusses produced by the eighteenth century, and to whom England owes her first secure footing in India. His other talents, therefore, may amply apologize for any deficiency in architectural science.

St. Thomas's Mount, which gives name to the road, is a slight elevation, two or three miles distant, where the Portuguese have a chapel dedicated to that saint. Here, likewise, he is said to have been interred; and bones are shown as his, with all the solemnities of popery, and reverenced with all the savage superstition of paganism; miracles are of course common; but all the saints in the calendar have not power

enough to work the miracle of making knavish priests cease to impose on the credulity of the people.

We saw the Nabob's, or Chepaux palace, at a distance, but no Europeans, under any pretence, are admitted within its walls, without the express permission of the English governor. An officer's guard continually resides within the precincts, in order to prevent improper intrusion of any sort, designing natives having more than once endeavoured to promote dissatisfaction and intrigue against the Company's government. It is scarcely necessary to inform you that the Nabob of the Carnatic has neither territory nor political power, the Company having kindly relieved him from both cares; they supply him, however, liberally with money.

I can almost fancy this place to be the head-quarters of the mosquito tribe; for they seem more numerous, and, as my skin can testify, bite more keenly than I ever before experienced. The nature of the adjoining country accounts for their numbers; and the nights being often sultry, and the windows consequently left open for the free admission of air, these insects likewise find ingress to bed-chambers, to the great annoyance of the luckless stranger, who reclines undefended by "Mosquito curtains." Their bite is painful, and to some truly agonizing; occasionally it ulcerates, producing an irritable sore; in general, however, the effect is a livid puffy swelling, so that some of our good-looking friends, who have gone to bed possessed of a very tolerable set of features, have arisen in the morning so much disfigured, as with difficulty to recognize themselves! Sometimes, indeed, the head becomes immoderately swelled, the eyes totally obscured, the cheeks, nose, and forehead puffed into dimensions far exceeding any thing like the usual measure of the human face divine.

Scarcely had I extended myself under the simple covering of a sheet, when the enemy assaulted me in numbers; in vain did I wield my arms in threatening attitudes; in vain exert innumerable missiles in my defence; I was too sweet a morsel, being fresh from Europe, to be so easily relinquished; and when at length it became impracticable to remain longer in bed, I paraded the room, fully calculating (though no saint,) on sharing the fate of St. Bartholomew before morning. At day-dawn, however, the foe beat a retreat, not without considerable loss, and I threw myself down, to seek a short repose after the exertions of the night. But suddenly such a volley of great guns and small arms burst from a body of soldiers, drawn up to exercise near my window, that sleep, which had been some time hovering round my eye-lids in doubt, at length forsook me altogether.

The people in power here seem wonderfully fond of smelling gunpowder; I suspect they never tried it in earnest. The saluting battery is scarcely ever at rest, for either news, or the arrival or departure of men-of-war, or the visits of the Nabob, and other important personages, keep it constantly employed; the grand army of France cannot expend much more powder, and, for my own part, I would as soon live in a besieged town.

My reflections, very a-propos to the occasion, were interrupted by a royal salute, announcing then a visit from the Nabob; he is fond of this ceremony, and the Company always pay it him, in return for his good-nature, in surrendering the troublesome office of governing his own kingdom. A Frenchman, however, informed me, with a chuckle of malicious satisfaction, that the prince was charged three rupees for every gun fired; I said it was impossible, he insisted on the fact; but I would fain think it only the slander of our enemy. I need not remind you, that the dominions of his highness first came under the direct influence of the Company, in 1792, in consequence of a treaty with Lord Cornwallis; and the tranquillity of the country, no doubt, required that measure.

While in bed abusing the soldiers for their noise, my trusty valet introduced a native barber. Attempting to rise, to submit to his razor, I was informed this was unnecessary, for, in the characteristic style of Indian indolence, it seems the operation is usually performed in bed, and, as people tell you, frequently when the person operated on is asleep, without the dexterous shaver once waking him.

When this was concluded, my man strongly recommended me to be *champoed.* By all means, said I—while I am in India, let me do as they do in India; and I lay with the patience of a lamb, while the operator pulled my ears, rubbed my cheeks, twitched my neck, cracked my joints, kneeded my muscles, extended my limbs with a jerk, and twisted my whole frame to his satisfaction. This operation, however, is truly refreshing. Joined to the bath, it renders the body pliable and pleasant, during the remainder of the day; the natives are expert at it; and, perhaps, no other but a Hindoo could do it so well, for to their natural gentleness, is added all the delicacy of a female.

Breakfast was but just removed, when a tribe of conjurers appeared, consisting of half-a-dozen men and a girl, armed with the whole apparatus of legerdemain. Among a variety of these, animate and inanimate, were several live snakes, one of which was at least nine feet long, as thick as my wrist, and which entwined itself around the bosom of one of the party, with (to us) horrible familiarity. Like some others, however,

it was harmless; two or three, of a different description, had been deprived of their poisonous fangs; among these was a cobza de capello, or hooded snake, celebrated for the virulence of its poison, for which no antidote has yet been discovered. The hood, from which the name is derived, is a delicate membrane extending over the head, but apparent only when the animal is irritated; at this period the appearance is striking, and resembles, if I may be allowed such a comparison, the halo, or rays, usually drawn around the head of our Saviour. The creature danced to rude music, and finished by fighting with a mongoos, (a species of monkey) at the command of the chief juggler, who, to our no small wonder, seemed gifted with the power of making even the sticks and stones in his magical bag do as he ordered.

At length one of the group went through the ceremony of swallowing the sword, an operation which I believe is no longer disbelieved among you in England.* But as all miracles admit of some explanation, it may be necessary to say that the sword, as it is called, is a flat piece of iron, about eighteen inches long, an inch or more broad, and blunt at the point as well as the edges. One end of this being introduced into the mouth, and the neck, at the same time, drawn upwards and backwards to form as straight a line as possible with the stomach, it is thrust gently down the œsophagus into the former organ, where it may be sometimes distinctly felt, and when withdrawn is commonly tinged with blood. Even when thus explained, the exploit is extraordinary; the man seems to feel no pain; he has been accustomed to it from his earliest years; but, it is said, never lives to an advanced age.

Another feat, scarcely less surprising, and not less revolting, followed. A tin vessel being filled with lumber, to the amount of at least fifteen pounds weight, a string was fastened to each side, and the other ends being attached to thin buttons of wood, the latter were introduced under the upper eye-lids, when these closing upon the lower, and the head being then elevated, the vessel was raised several inches from the floor, by the mere exertion of their muscular power!—I know not when I felt more anxiety; the least slip threatened to tear the eyes from their sockets. But failure, in any bodily exertion of dexterity, is never dreamt of by a Hindoo, for habit and temperance have reduced his muscles and joints to the flexibility of catgut. Even the tongue has not escaped his ingenuity. Another of the tribe threaded a dozen small beads by

* The appearance of the Indian Jugglers in England, three years after the above was written, has made this feat familiar to every one.

means of this new substitute for fingers, in a shorter time than I could with both hands: in these performances there was no deception. The mere slight-of-hand tricks were all new to us, and so well performed, as to defy us all, stationed before, behind, and on each side of him, to trace the manner how. Three or four rupees paid the party handsomely, who retired making as many salams as might have satisfied even the dignity of the mogul.

A juggler of a different kind succeeded the disciples of Katterfelto. Some of our companions being in want of the light clothing of the country, directed a vender to be introduced, who, having descanted on the quality of his goods with the eloquence of Cheapside, the bargain was struck, and the money produced, when the dubash, who had not hitherto interfered, made a private signal of disapprobation, and on minute inspection, the cheat was discovered. They were, in fact, old and nearly thread-bare articles, with a former owner's name evidently erased, but vamped up by means of a brown stiffening matter to appear like new, and, as such, frequently imposed upon strangers unacquainted with the trick. The fellow's ingenuity, however, did not go unrewarded; for he beat a hasty retreat, under the discipline of a horsewhip.

Articles of this description are commonly stolen and prepared for sale, in a celebrated mart for ingenious industry here, termed the *Thieving Bazaar.* This I possessed curiosity enough to visit. The establishment, it appears, is conducted something on the plan of Jonathan Wild's shop, for any favourite article of no great value, lost in the morning, may probably be procured here. in the evening, for a certain gratuity, provided no questions be asked. It is tolerably extensive; the sales take place generally in the evening; and strangers are admitted without reserve; but to those inclined to indulge their curiosity, I would recommend the homely advice of having their eyes about them. I did not venture near these well-guarded premises before depositing my purse, watch, handkerchief, and other loose moveables at the inn; and therefore, like a skilful general, made good my retreat, without loss; one of the officers, who was less cautious, had his pocket disburthened of twenty dollars.

A Hindoo thief is, perhaps, in his own way, one of the most expert members of the fraternity. For all the ingenuity and suppleness, both of body and mind, by which he is characterised in common matters, are exerted, in a superior degree, on occasions of this kind; he seldom uses violence; finesse and trick are his principal weapons; and of these many amusing anecdotes are told. The story of the horse-stealer, who in

shewing the mode of getting off with one animal, actually contrived to steal a second before the face of the owner, is a well-known fact.

An officer lately encamped, mentioned an instance of a tent being so frequently robbed, notwithstanding the vigilance of a sentinel, that the latter was on the point of being punished as an accomplice, when the real thief was discovered in the person of a camp-follower, who, by stripping himself naked, except a rug thrown over the back, found free ingress, by imitating, upon all fours, the bark and actions of a pariah dog. This they do very exactly, as well as the cries of the jackall and wild-peacock, by which many deceptions are practised.

Another officer, accustomed to put trifling sums of money on his tent-table at night, after the disbursements of the day, discovered them so frequently missing in the morning, that they were at length deposited under his pillow. The depredators (two camp-followers) suspecting the place of concealment, and calculating, perhaps, on a still greater prize, hit upon the novel stratagem of fixing a noose round his leg when asleep, and while one stationed without, by a violent jerk, drew him out of bed, the other properly placed within, quietly secured the booty; and the subject of the trick suspecting it to be merely the waggery of his brother-officers, took no further notice, till, in the morning, he discovered the theft. It is also a fact, that a captain in one of the regiments employed in the siege of Bhurtpore, returning fatigued from the trenches, threw himself down to rest, and awaking in an hour or two, found his bedding, clothes, and even trunks on which, as a temporary bedstead, they and he himself had been laid out, carried off without the thieves' disturbing him! Stealing the bed from under one, is, therefore, you see, not so improbable an occurrence as you may have supposed.

To this instructive history I must not omit to add a characteristic postscript. Our lively companion B—, who, by his tricks and vivacity, has been a great annoyance to the natives, was, at length, by an expert manœuvre of an attendant, relieved of his watch. Having a good knowledge of the people, however, by dint of threats, and a species of violence in making part of the group for some time prisoners, it was, after much shuffling and evasion, restored, without even the customary tribute of a present.

To an idler like myself, the forenoon in this fiery climate is the most tedious part of the day. The sun is, indeed, all-powerful; it relaxes every fibre of the body, and almost every idea of the mind, into something like weakness; no loungers dare attempt to perambulate the streets; men of business keep

in their offices, lightly clad in the thin fabrics of the country; and the women remain secluded in their inmost and coolest recesses, rarely accessible to strangers.

We have, therefore, the choice of lounging within-doors, half naked, on a sofa, of visiting go-downs and outcries, or of playing billiards and sipping a species of local nectar, termed *mug*,* which Jupiter himself, had he been forced to keep his court in scorching Madras, might not have disdained to quaff. Away from town, some of our dash-a-long countrymen, in defiance of the sun, employ themselves in riding or sporting, and reap the reward of their exertions in an attack of "liver," or a stroke of the sun. Any thing, in fact, is preferred to a visitation from the fiend *ennui*. This spectre, one of the worst of the ghost-race, haunts all tropical climates, particularly the minds of the young and giddy, those unaccustomed to the climate, or possessed of few mental resources; and the dread of it sometimes leads to the vice of gambling. Common occupations, like common viands, do not seem to suit this latitude; the mind, like the palate, requires to be roused from occasional torpor by high stimuli, and hence is said to arise that partiality of the natives for shew and splendour, voluptuousness and meretricious allurements, supposed to characterize the majority of people born within the tropics.

In the evening, some military friends introduced us, in the absence of better amusement, to a boarding-school dance, formed of what are called *cheches*, or the offspring of Europeans by native women. Several of these are pretty girls, often well-instructed, occasionally accomplished, and variously tinged from pure, or almost pure, white, to a dingy brown. The governess seemed a sensible woman, but, in my life, I never saw such a collection of curiosities as her pupils.

The first glance was enough to discover that the room was not overstocked with beauty; and in expectation of more than an ordinary portion of talent, or good-humour, with which Nature often makes amends for an unfortunate face, made my advances to the plainest (dare I say ugliest?) countenance I could see, on some passing topic. The lady, however, surveyed me with a scowl, and, without deigning to answer, turned her back: I continued the conversation, and she changed her seat.

Partly prepared for this reception, it scarcely surprised me; but, changing my battery, attacked a second with such suc-

* A mixture of Madeira, porter, sugar, and spices; something like the porter-cup of the West Indies.

cess as to gain her assent to becoming my partner by a dignified nod; not all my assiduities, however, or good-humour, could extract a smile, or any other than monosyllabic answers from my charmer.

A few of my companions were not even so fortunate. "Miss ——," said one to a demure-looking damsel, seated in a corner, "will you permit me the honour of your hand for the dance?" —"No, I wont," was the reply.—Others drawled out, "I do-n't kn-ow," or, "I ca-nt prom-ise;" and a few would not stand up even after having consented: it was impossible to suppress a smile at this strange sample of the manners of an Indian school, and, in return, we received several angry and contemptuous looks; and we seemed, in fact, to be regarded altogether with a most distrustful eye.

In excuse, however, for their behaviour, it must be acknowledged that the freaks of some young military sparks, who occasionally make parties to *quiz*, as the phrase is, or to annoy them, cause an excusable jealousy of the designs of others; and I presume we were not so perfectly sedate in aspect as not to give rise to suspicion that our visit was for a similar purpose. The men, I perceive, generally speak with a species of contempt of this class of females, accusing them of being proud, cold, and insensible, which, added to an indifferent education, and, in general, but a slight acquaintance with genteel society, render them, perhaps, not the most attractive companions. It would be very unjust, however, to accuse the whole with the defects or peculiarities of some; Nature never made women to be constitutionally disagreeable; and I understand that several accomplished females of this class are to be found in India.

It was late ere we reached the inn, but the substantial joys of a good supper made amends for the disdain of our late fair associates; conviviality shone round the board, and the jovial spirit of the sons of Neptune, wild and untamed as their element, animated all with a vigour of which you men who live for every day, have scarcely any conception. Like butterflies, we exist only for an hour,—that is, we may be said to live only when upon *terra firma*;—let loose by fits and starts from the confinement of a ship, and the trammels of the quarter-deck, the passions, from being pent up, rush forth with the violence of a hurricane; the juice of the grape went freely round; the adventure of the evening was only remembered in a *jeu d'esprit* which——but I have made a vow against sending you verses, and therefore shall be silent.

Our lively companion B——, who, by his whim and local knowledge, has been the life of our party, at length proposed to sally forth in quest of adventures. The modest goddess of

night with sleep and silence in her train, had cast every object into utter darkness. Diana too, sweet oracle of chastity! had effectually cleared the way, for not a Cyprian wanderer, at once the victim and the scourge of large cities, interrupted our progress. Fortune confessedly favours the adventurous; we had not traversed many streets when the horizon, from total darkness, seemed at once brilliantly illuminated; the first conjecture was fire; but, in a moment afterwards, a thousand torches, flying to and fro, amid a large concourse of people, proclaimed some more joyful occasion, which, at least, promised all that we desired—a new adventure.

By the civility of the people we were soon ushered through the crowd, to the centre of the scene of rejoicing, which was in front of a respectable house, where a Hindoo marriage, we were informed, was then celebrating; and the parties being of consequence, it is customary to display the joy of their families in public. The house was illuminated by so many torches as fairly to shame night out of countenance; but the surrounding scene beggars all description. Figure to yourself about four thousand blacks, collected within a moderate space, a vast number painted red, white, and yellow, on the ground of the natural black; several dancing, many bearing torches elevated on long poles, which cast a ghastly glare on the hideous figures beneath; some shouting, screaming, and jumping like maniacs; others beating tom-toms, and playing on uncouth instruments; combine this with the dusky canopy of heaven, and the appearance of the sooty musicians attired in tinsel, and the fantastic finery of what we may suppose would be the garb of infernals on a gala-day:—altogether, it required no great stretch of the imagination to fancy myself in the precincts of Pandemonium. Several open palanquins, variously ornamented, awaited the friends of the happy couple at the door. One in the centre, more gay than others, indicated its devotion to Hymen, the canopy being tastefully interwoven with feathers and odoriferous flowers, festooned with the same, which had altogether a pretty effect.

Anxious to witness the ceremony, we attempted to gain admission to the house, but were prevented by information that it was contrary to custom to receive European visitors, at such a time. This, I believe, is not really the fact; our informant, who seemed director of the ceremonies without doors, probably suspected we were more intent on a frolic than the gratification of mere curiosity. Several friends, however, waited like ourselves at the entrance, till a flourish from the demoniacal band ushered the happy parties into the street, preceded by a company of dancing girls. You may conceive our surprise, when, for a

moment, forgetting the Hindoo custom, two children were pointed out as the bride and bridegroom. The boy seemed about twelve years of age, the girl nine or ten, both possessing interesting faces, but to our ideas, forming a ludicrous caricature on the characters of man and wife. Strictly speaking, however, this is only the act of betrothing, as the parties return to their respective parents, and consummation does not take place for some years afterwards.

The young couple were placed in the same vehicle, face to face; the lover did not once appear to notice his mistress; his eye seemed fixed on vacancy, till our uniform attracted his gaze. The procession, in the meantime, moved slowly forward, during which, infinite congratulations were offered on the occasion, while the music, rockets, torches, and shouts of triumph were, to our eyes and ears, really overpowering. At intervals, a halt was made, to give the dancing girls an opportunity of exhibiting; their motions were slow, their attitudes generally not ungraceful, but occasionally too expressive for the meridian of strict chastity. The greater part of the night is thus spent in parading the streets; a kind of proclamation of happiness which, from the mode of union between the parties, we should think might be spared. How do you suppose the fair damsels of England would feel, on being thus handed over like quadrupeds to their future masters?

These extraordinary people seem to have scarcely a principle of free-will in any thing; all their laws and customs, even in trivial matters, bear on the point of shackling the operations of the mind. They appear to exist, eat, drink, work, think, and worship, almost by rote; for their political institutions most insidiously instil the necessity of continuing in the same path of life trodden by their fathers, without presuming to aspire beyond it, by which means alone, they are told, they can please the disposer of all things. This principle we perceive even extends to marriage, and their affections are thus regulated by law; yet some of the "all for love" couples of Europe will be surprised to hear, that Hindoo marriages are not more unhappy than others; nay, on the contrary, that the women are devoted to their husbands, with a zeal, independent of religious motives, that extends to self-immolation on their funeral pile.

This, however, is said to be a passive rather than active affection,—a feeling of pride rather than of love;—and what is often mentioned as a proof of want of natural affection among the women all over India, is the facility with which the lower class, on the slightest difficulty, dispose of their children to the highest bidder, as well as commit infanticide. The Chinese, according to the best writers, with still greater barbarity, systematically

practise the same crime, from the same cause; yet both nations are termed "highly civilized." The fact, perhaps, is, that as in neither country do the women hold their proper rank in the scale of society, so a disregard for their offspring may be but the consequence of the degradations inflicted upon them, by a rude condition of society.

The Hindoo character is, in every respect, one of the most singular in nature; it has exercised the ablest pens to delineate, and mine therefore may be spared; but while you will acquit me of the presumption of attempting to draw what I am so imperfectly acquainted with, it is yet impossible to look at it even superficially without wonder. It presents the picture of a people marked for a succession of ages by a studied routine, a minute sameness of opinions and manners, which the occasional irruptions of Heathen, Mohammedan, and Christian conquerors have not altered. History, perhaps, furnishes no other instance of this description; they are still, in every point, as we see, unchanged; with the exception of a few hardy mountaineers, nature seems to have cast the mind of each individual of this vast country in the same mould; for neither accident, nor time, nor force, seems to have elicited any portion of that healthful variety of character, on which the best interests of a large community depend.

Viewed in the labours of the field or the loom, in courts or politics, in affluence or poverty, in low or elevated stations, we observe ingenuity, patience, docility, temperance, frequently interwoven, particularly in political matters, with the worst of crimes; fraud, ill-faith, and treachery, are almost, indeed, the distinguishing characteristics of an Indian court. By nature, the people appear peculiarly adapted to the arts of peace; yet those who, perhaps, shudder at death from a sword, meet it contentedly, under certain circumstances, from starvation. Some perform voluntary penances almost surpassing human fortitude to bear; while others joyfully court death, by precipitating themselves under the chariot-wheels of a wretched idol. And what is still more strange, though thus invincibly attached to their religion, they present the novel spectacle of being the most perfect bigots, without in the least desiring to make proselytes.

A very surprising degree of art seems to have been exerted at an early period, so to mix their religious and state policy as that the former might, in time, gain the undisputed ascendancy. This was effected; and the powers thus acquired by a knavish priesthood, were perpetuated by the bold and astonishing manœuvre of a division into *castes*, an institution unknown to any other people. It is difficult to say which was the more ex-

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traordinary, the art that secured, or the simplicity that submitted to these degrading distinctions. Their direct tendency was, evidently, to disunite the great body of the nation, giving to each class, different views and prospects in life; the various ranks, therefore, became almost aliens to each other; their hopes and interests were frequently opposed; they had few feelings in common; the insurmountable barrier of *caste*, placed the members of one great portion of the community at an immeasurable distance from those of many others, though nature had destined all equally to enjoy her benefits. It seems also reasonable to suppose, that the same abominable restrictions considerably fettered the operations of national genius, or mind; for a people so ingenious in many of the arts, and familiar with a few of the sciences, might be supposed to have made considerable progress in moral knowledge; but this is not the case. Genius, in fact, has no stimulus, and enterprize little reward, where men are reduced to the state of passive machines; and where the spirit of emulation, one of the great levers that keeps the intellectual world in motion, is destroyed, by the law which decrees that the son shall follow the occupation of the father.

You will be surprised to hear that this institution is sometimes defended. I once heard an ingenious man, long resident in India, urge, more perhaps from the love of argument than conviction, that it tended to public tranquillity, by pointing out to the lower classes, the routine of life to be pursued, and thus affording little scope for the exercise of the more turbulent passions. If these, however, have been by this means partially quieted, others of a nobler kind were likewise smothered; if ambition, courage, and national glory, have been extinguished or deadened in the breast of the Hindoostanee, this may partly serve to explain why successive conquerors have, with so much ease, at all eras, over-run his country.

In the neighbouring state of Tibet, where the government and religion are still more completely identified, the degradation of our species is, perhaps, greater. The institution of the Grand Lama, where an infant incapable of speech is sometimes the chief performer, says little for the intelligence of the population; but gives colour to the plea of railers against the ministers of religion, that they have always sacrificed the best interests of the human race to their personal aggrandizement. With regard to the Hindoos, time seems to have fixed their institutions beyond the possibility of any human power to remove, unless assisted by one of those wonderful revolutions in the minds of men which now and then change the moral aspect of the world.

LETTER III.

Alleged Inhospitality.—Amusements.—Late Disagreements.—Missionaries.—Singular Character of the Country.—Civilians and Soldiers.—Allowances to the Army and Navy.—Anchorage in the Roads.—Probable future Tranquillity of the Presidency.—Adventurers.

At Sea, June 10th.

Away from the heat, the sand, and the mosquitoes of Madras, and again refreshed by the invigorating breeze from the ocean, we may pause for a few moments, in order to cast a look, though by no means a " longing" one, behind.

I know not how it is, but, by some means, Madras has acquired the reputation of inhospitality; and to tell you the truth, willing as I am to report well of all my acquaintance, none of the officers found any personal experience to the contrary. Several of our military brethren confirmed the unfavourable impressions received from others. India is so generally noted for attention to strangers, that it is almost a matter of course; Bengal is celebrated by all visitors, Bombay likewise receives its due meed of praise; but I have not yet met with a single voucher, written or verbal, in favour of the second presidency; on the contrary, much reproach, and a great deal of satire. I forget the name of the writer who says that this virtue belongs to elevated regions, from the cheerful sensations imparted to the mind, by a rarer atmosphere; while the denser vapours engendered in lower situations, by dulling the edge of sensibility, create churlishness. What a pity that the air of Madras should counteract the good dispositions of the people!

But I am inclined to think there is little other evidence wanting of the ill-humour of a place, than the bad report of officers. They are, you may well conceive, the chronicles of the spot they inhabit; with both leisure and inclination to learn all its anecdotes, intrigues, and secrets, willing to be pleased, fond of general intercourse, seldom burthened, particularly the naval part, with the sweets of life, and willing to enjoy them when they can. They have a species of prescriptive claim to the attentions of their less warlike brethren; but, independent of this, it is really an act of good-nature to entice them from the pleasures of the bottle, to the more rational charms of society; for, if deprived by circumstances of the one, necessity may drive them to the other, for a companion, and thus all their follies and half their vices originate.

The public amusements are confined to balls at the Pan-

theon, very ceremonious, and plays; neither of which, however, occurred during our stay. The former constitutes the shew-room for all the new faces imported from Europe, to dazzle the eyes of the Indians; and, if a fair stranger has the good fortune to be admired and followed at first, she may calculate, I have been told, on speedily finding a husband; should any accident, however, keep her for some time unnoticed, she may, on the contrary, linger on hand. Spinsters, indeed, to the discredit of male gallantry, are by no means so uncommon here as might be expected; I know not the cause; some attribute it to the men having become fastidious, some to the reluctance of a battered Indian constitution to encounter European vigour and beauty, some to the risk of picking up a partner who had not quitted Europe without *particular* reasons, some to increased illicit intercourse with the native women.

The married ladies are accused of pride, or at least of an immoderate love of precedency on public occasions, arising either from family-descent, fortune, or the situations held by their husbands; and from which several determined struggles have taken place between the fair candidates for rank. The daughter of a Scotch baronet, it seems, lately claimed the post of honour from a lady, whose husband held a higher official situation than her own; the point was warmly contested; it almost reached the point where politeness ceases, when at length it was recollected, that the husband of the plebeian fair one was likewise the son of a baronet, and the Caledonian matron was thus worsted. I might repeat a hundred ludicrous encounters of this description, but you must hear only my own, not any second-hand scandal. The men are, on the whole, what may be termed somewhat stiff, full of business and money, and a competent knowledge how to take care of it.

You may probably expect me to say something on the subject of the late fearful convulsion in the Madras army; but, as it seems almost buried in oblivion here, so it ought to be every where else. Nothing could be more pregnant with utter ruin to the British power in India; for, during its continuance, not only our supremacy, but our very name in the country, hung by a thread. I have, of course, heard much on both sides of the question, perhaps more in favour of the military than otherwise, but amid conflicting opinions, it seems the general idea, that the explosion might have been prevented, and that the measures of the Government savored of a desperation not very characteristic of moderation or wisdom. Among the principal of these, was the attempt to detach the native soldiers and officers from their European commanders; a lesson which it is more to be hoped than expected they will forget; no measure

could be more inconsiderate in itself, none more calculated to overturn all the subordination, civil as well as military, which we have been labouring, for so many years, to establish. Both parties, no doubt, were in fault; both, in their eager desire for superiority, displayed not less want of respect for themselves, than utter disregard to the interests of their country; and both, it is said by those who have no bias on the point, ought to be equally and severely condemned. When we quitted England, the contest was not then understood, but ere this, you doubtless possess volumes on the subject; there, it may be discussed dispassionately; here, however, it is next to impossible, without leaning to one side or the other.

A prevailing topic of conversation was the introduction of missionaries for the purpose of converting the natives, which by the older and better informed residents, is commonly condemned. This censure, perhaps, is premature. Of the vast benefits, temporal as well as eternal, derived from an enlightened religion, scarcely an adequate idea is entertained even by ourselves; it has been the parent of morality, and civilization, and science, the great refiner of European men and passions, the healing balm sent from heaven to soothe the sorrows of the human heart, in its struggles through life; and if these advantages can be communicated to so many millions of our fellow-creatures, the heart of the christian and philanthropist cannot but rejoice.

The opponents of the measure, while they admit its moral utility, consider conversion quite impracticable with such a bigotted race as the Hindoos, and that the folly of the scheme is its least objection. Men, say they, who have emulously resisted the arguments, exhortations, threats, persecutions, and murders of the Mohammedans, are not likely to embrace, by mere persuasion, another system of worship which they as little understand; the doctrines of Mahomet, in fact, had a greater chance of success, by administering to the passions and senses of a voluptuous people, than the more simple and self-denying tenets of Christ. Their superstitions, likewise, are so intimately connected with political circumstances, that they must fall together; for when disenthralled from the former, the latter cannot be expected to continue long, and the shock of such a revolution in the national character must be fatal to the dominion of Europeans; the empire of public opinion would be as rapidly destroyed as it has been acquired.

It is even said, that should we succeed in the attempt, little will be gained by the exchange. The people will be neither quieter subjects nor better men; for unfortunately present experience teaches, that, along with European instruction, they

imbibe more than a proportion of our vices. Besides, their feelings as well as prejudices must be adverse to the change. On the one hand, is sure to be incurred the contempt and abhorrence of all castes and classes of their countrymen, for, under such circumstances, their very touch would be considered the deepest contamination; while, on the other, is received what may be thought merely a speculative advantage. But the grand objection is its being politically inexpedient. To christianize, it is urged, will be only to revolutionize the country, as the temper of the people cannot but materially alter with their faith; their pliancy with the spirit of free-inquiry to which it gives birth; and that some new Tippoo, persuaded, perhaps bullied, into our belief, and taught his own strength in moral as in physical power, might rouse the dormant energies of the nation, and when too late, teach his instructors the fatal tendency of their lesson.

The subject is so interesting, that I shall make no apology for troubling you with these opinions. To an enthusiast in the cause, who rushes forward in the work of salvation, regardless of consequences, they will doubtless seem feeble; least of all, will a zealous missionary turn aside from his apostolic functions to the consideration of worldly prudence. If the system, therefore, be adopted, the conduct of the persons employed should be rigidly scrutinized by government; they themselves ought likewise to remember their task is so much the more delicate and difficult, on account of the people being a long remove from the ignorance and barbarism characterizing the Negroes, the Hottentots, the Caffers, and the South Sea islanders, to whom their labours in preaching the truths of the Gospel have been hitherto principally confined.

India, on the whole, is an extraordinary country. The people, at least, constitute a fine study for a philosophizing observer; and had the ancients known as much of it as we do, it would doubtless have formed a regulation of their schools, that none should presume to investigate the nature of man, without having travelled thither. If, as the poet says, man be the proper study of mankind, it may be there amply indulged, as few places furnish more materials for thinking; the christian, the politician, the merely metaphysical speculator, all may exercise their contemplative and reasoning faculties to advantage: nor will the mathematician, the naturalist, the linguist, or the general scholar, be wholly unemployed; and for the arts of war and commerce, it is already celebrated.

Yet much as I rejoice to have had even a partial view of this interesting land, I would not wish to live in it. Wealth being the universal pursuit, it forms the occupation of every

man you meet; and though in itself a most agreeable thing, as we all know, yet a visitor looks for some variety in the subdivision of professions and classes; but of the latter, there are here only two, the mercantile and military. Neither is the climate desirable. The heat, except in the upper provinces, almost precludes the free exercise of the limbs, and when the novelty is worn off, there will be little enjoyment in being dangled on men's shoulders in a palanquin, or in being stewed to death in an Indian ball-room, or in eating one's-self to death, if I may be allowed this phrase, at an Indian feast; while a few good European servants will do more work, with much less trouble, than the usual army of native attendants kept in respectable houses, many of whom disdain to brush your coat though they polish your boots; while others bring you water to wash, who conceive themselves degraded by taking it away, for such are the ridiculous caprices of *caste*.

Civilians appear to be the only persons who make money; soldiers rarely, except, perhaps, the heads of the profession, and those who have had the good fortune to hold lucrative staff-appointments. Fortunes are by no means so common as formerly; and, notwithstanding a little exterior shew, which is the distinguishing feature of the country, the generality of persons are not so rich as is believed. A servant of the Company, who goes out as writer, may return, in twenty or thirty years, with thirty or forty thousand pounds, provided he takes especial care of it, but not otherwise; many, indeed, will not be so fortunate without adventitious aids. They all look forward to the prospect of spending it in their native country; but when this period arrives, the day for enjoyment has commonly gone by; worn out perhaps by the climate, or lingering with the "liver," and, as is usually the case, unsettled in life, they find little pleasure in a cold and humid climate, or in the cravings of a train of needy relations after their wealth. Even a rich man, in this situation, is not a subject of envy, but rather a memento of labour misapplied; for he has risked his health, and droned out his existence, in acquiring what is but a poor compensation for either—a little money. Adieu to riches on such conditions. One-fourth the sum, gained in England, will ensure fifty times the enjoyment.

The military of the Company are more indifferently situated, in some respects, than the aspiring young candidates for warlike fame in England would believe; and, on arriving here, finding their expectations a little disappointed, sometimes feel a temporary disgust to the service, terming it a genteel transportation for younger brothers. Two or three years are com-

monly occupied in acquiring the native language; the young adventurer then commences ensign, and seldom gets his company under twelve or fourteen years service.

The duty, likewise, is disagreeable, in being confined (except in the late expeditions to the French and Dutch islands,) to the country itself, in being quartered in detached parties and unfrequented districts, without society, books, or the means of general knowledge, added to the long period to which they have to look forward for a change; and, not the least grievance, let me say, the deprivation of agreeable and intelligent female companions. There is also another powerful consideration to an adventurous mind, in producing dislike to this service. Many a gallant fellow falls here in the conflicts with the refractory native chiefs, whose name, perhaps, is little known beyond the regiment, or remembered beyond the mouth, and leaving scarcely a memorial of his fate to his friends; but who in Europe would have received the merited tribute of honour and regret due to the memory of the brave.

The superior officers frequently become the ablest men in India, many at present not merely excelling in their profession, but eminent as writers, statesmen, and politicians. Others, from their local knowledge of the conflicting native interests, and intimate acquaintance with the language, are fitted and, indeed, commonly chosen for the office of Residents at the native courts, a situation which none but the cleverest, best-informed, and most acute men in the country can fill. All these considerations, added to their other merits and services, should have had their full weight with persons in authority on the late unfortunate occasion, for the Company's service is certainly one of danger as well as privation, and yet of comparative obscurity to its followers; but one which England, while she retains India, must constantly supply with her educated youth, and which it is, therefore, her obvious policy and interest to encourage.

I should much wish to spend a twelvemonth in visiting the different precidencies, and in making some excursions through the country. To do this, however, the governor-general's leave would, I understand, be necessary for any one not in the Company's service. Strangers are jealously observed, and must render a due explanation of their plans and motives in perambulating the country, before they can obtain permission for that purpose. Holding his majesty's commission, these obstacles, of course, do not apply to myself, but a visitor from Europe, who should perchance indulge the faculty of loco-motion without these necessary preliminaries, would soon find himself

not on the road to the interior, but, under charge of a few peons of the police, pushed on-board the first ship for Europe; this strict *surveillance* is, however, absolutely necessary.

To a naval officer, the station is by no means unpleasant, provided he be pretty well furnished in that part of the animal system called the pocket; without this he had better remain on-board his ship, and contemplate the shore, its temptations and pleasures, at a respectful distance. While all the necessaries of life are cheap, the aggregate of living, as already mentioned, is high; even the single requisite of a palanquin, an absolutely necessary vehicle for every person pretending to the character of a gentleman, and without which he is in danger of a *stroke of the sun*, is an expence his pay cannot afford. It is remarkable, that the higher classes of the naval service receive liberal allowances from the Company, while the junior are treated like mendicants, whom it is bad policy to encourage. At the same time it is impossible not to remark, and to feel, the contrast presented by the army, where all, from the commander in chief to the private, are well and even splendidly paid. The amount of these allowances, as they are little known in Europe, may be mentioned.

The commander-in-chief of the navy, besides a house on-shore, receives from the Company 3000*l.* per annum for his table and incidental expences; a post-captain 500*l.*; a commander 250*l.*: the lieutenants, surgeon, master, officers of marines, &c., holding the next degree of rank, a certain sum to their mess, something less than 20*l.* each! Captains in the army, who rank with these officers, on the contrary, receive upon full batta nearly 400*l.*, and subalterns nearly 200*l.* per annum, exclusive of government-pay.

Doubtless they deserve it; but why should the same class in the navy be so far thrown into the shade? Can the annals of India afford no record of their services? Does her commerce exist but by their exertions? Is not her territory in danger of invasion every hour, were it not for their aid, against the envious and watchful rivalry of every state in Europe?

I had almost forgotten to mention, that the violence of the surf, at all times here, has given rise to several projects *in embryo*, for obviating its effects, among others that of a pier or jetty, to shelter the roads from the N. E. monsoon. This scheme, at first, actually received some countenance, though absurd in the extreme, for I think it would be nearly as practicable to build a bridge from Dover to Calais. Nor is there any probable method of protecting vessels bound to this capital of the Coromandel coast, except by changing its site altogether, which, from the expense, time, labour, and difficulties

attending such removal, is never likely to be attempted. The cause of the surf along the whole of this coast, down to Bengal, has never, that I am aware of, been attempted to be explained; nor, indeed, has it been any where else philosophically considered, though offering many curious phenomena; such as prevailing equally in calm and windy weather, on flat or on steep shores, on the leeward as well as windward sides of lands and islands, in sheltered coves as on more exposed portions of the coast. May not volcanic fire, acting on the bed of the sea near this shore, have something to do with the surf, particularly as a violent eruption is recorded to have taken place, about sixty years ago, at a little distance from Pondicherry?

The latitude of Madras is 13° 4′ N. longitude, 80° 21′ E. The rise and fall of tide is so trifling as to be scarcely perceptible. October, November, and December, are considered the most dangerous months for shipping at anchor, on account of the hurricanes; April and May are sometimes as bad; the winds commence, on these occasions, commonly from the northward, or N. W. and veer round by degrees to the eastward. The best means of evading their effects, is to cut or slip the cable, and run to sea, keeping well off till the weather moderates. For the convenience of vessels approaching the coast in the night, a light is exhibited, observable at fifteen or eighteen miles distance.

On the land side, Madras is now pretty secure from interruption by troublesome or warlike neighbours; for it is remarkable that, though our oldest capital in this country, it has been more frequently and recently in jeopardy than any other. Pondicherry formerly, and Mysore latterly, were its deadly and unceasing foes. The power of France has long been annihilated; but it is only twelve years since Tippoo was hurled to the tombs of his fathers, and that the people of Fort St. George might be said to breathe freely. The Nabob (or rather Nawaub) of the Carnatic, is harmless, and entirely in our power; some others are nearly in the same situation; and except another unhappy commotion should occur among ourselves, its tranquillity promises to continue uninterrupted so long as we preserve, with any tolerable care, the stupendous "empire of opinion."

The great inducement for Englishmen adventurers here, and in the other capitals of Calcutta and Bombay, is the facility which trade and shop-keeping afford of making money. Accordingly, all the presidencies contain considerable numbers of this class, who consider themselves men of no ordinary importance; but whom it puzzles those unacquainted with the

business, how they could possibly find their way hither. You may, perhaps, think that it requires interest, money, and strong recommendations to do this;—no such thing;—the court of directors are never consulted on the subject. A captain of a trading-ship enters a person on his books, under a fictitious name, as part of his crew, who, as soon as he arrives in the country, takes up his quarters on-shore, and there remains, being put down *run*, or deserted, on the books; and so long as he behaves well, government takes no notice of him.

Many others have been bonâ fide seamen, clerks, stewards, and servants in the Indiamen, and have actually deserted, keeping concealed till the ship sailed, and then setting up as tradesmen, innkeepers, and shop (I beg pardon, for this word is a gross insult in all our colonies) store-keepers I mean, and their captain, at a future time, from motives of humanity, does not interrupt their new avocations. In process of time, they get wealthy, rise gradually in the scale of importance, return to England, purchase a mansion and estate, set up for the first borough that offers, and, sometimes, deign to take under their special patronage, those who have title and family, but, perhaps, not much of "this world's goods" to introduce them into the world of fashion. And their success in life would not only be honourable to themselves, but little remarked, were it not for the pride and foolish importance which the majority assume in their native country, who were little, or not at all, noticed in the scene of their fortunate industry.